



Special Olympics

get into it

education and engagement tools
for teachers and students



Activity 2: 9–12 Lessons

What Does My Community Look Like?

Activity Overview:

In this lesson, students take a literal and figurative snapshot of their community with regard to tolerance/inclusion of those with intellectual disabilities. They start by creating a picture of their community based on their own perceptions. Then they repeat this exercise as if they were someone with an intellectual disability to see how the experience changes. Student groups design a method to assess current attitudes, access, and programs for those with intellectual disabilities in their community and then assess how their community is doing in these areas. Finally, students report their results to the community. This lesson would work well in a unit that explores social justice or service-learning.



Let me win. But
if I cannot win,
let me be brave
in the attempt.

Special Olympics
Athlete Oath

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Cross-Curricular Connections:

In addition to language arts, this lesson extends into mathematics, visual arts, technology, and service-learning. Students can use visual arts skills such as sketching, photography, technology, and video skills when they create the pictures of their community. This lesson also serves as the investigation portion of a traditional service-learning process.

Academic Skills Addressed:

- Posing reasoned questions drawn from previous learning and from personal experiences;
- Using an inquiry process and research strategies to explore a topic;
- Receiving, exploring, and evaluating the ideas and opinions of others;
- Developing creative and reflective texts;
- Synthesizing data to conduct an evaluation; and
- Generating information to share in the greater community.

Desired Outcomes:

Students will:

- Reflect upon the current environment of tolerance/inclusion toward those with intellectual disabilities in the community.
- Understand how a person with intellectual disabilities might see the community.
- Assess the community's current attitudes, access, programs, and climate.
- Communicate the results of the above assessment.

Time Required:

Three to four 45-minute periods, plus additional time outside of class



PHOTO BY: Ryan Eades



"We could learn a lot from crayons; some are sharp, some are pretty, some are dull, some have weird names, and all are different colors...but they all have to learn to live in the same box."

Author Unknown

Activity 2:

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Materials Needed:

- Art materials, cameras, and/or video equipment
- Copies of Reproducible 2.1, *A Picture of Your Community*

Background:

- Before beginning this lesson, you will want to think about options for defining "community." It may seem like a daunting task to create a picture of your entire town or city so a neighborhood or zip code may be a better option. You may wish to research the answers to some of the questions that your students will research. This will help you guide their question development and research plans. You may also want to determine if there are specific resources/staff that can help them learn the answers. For example, there may be special education staff or guidance counselors who could come to the class to be interviewed.
- For more information about assessing and reflecting upon the existing community and identifying community assets, refer to (pages 22-29) the *Investigation* section of the *Service-Learning Instructional Planning Guide*. This supplemental guide is available for download at: www.specialolympics.org
- Also refer to the *Teacher Background: Service-Learning Approach* in this guide (Pages 45-46).

Important Terms:

asset, inclusion, intellectual disability, mainstream, perceptions, tolerance



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PART ONE



How can people who live in the same community see it from completely different perspectives?

Activity 2: What Does My Community Look Like?

Activity Steps and Suggestions:

1. Write the word, “community” on the board and ask students to share their perceptions of what their community is. Come up with a definition or parameter on which the class can focus. For example, will you consider “your community” the town in which you live, a particular neighborhood, or something else? **(Educate)**
2. Once students have defined “community,” ask them to close their eyes and visualize their community. Have them answer the following questions:
 - *If you were asked to describe your community using three words, what words would you choose?* Challenge students to go beyond “obvious” words like “big,” “cold,” or “small.”
 - *What assets does the community have that help to make it unique?*
 - *What’s something you’d like to learn about your community?*
 - *If you were choosing a place to live, would you choose your community? Why or why not?*
 - *If you were to give your community a “grade,” what might it be, and why?* **(Educate)**
3. Challenge students to draw, photograph, or videotape a “picture” of their community from their own perspective. (Encourage students to take a community walk or observe different areas within the community before completing this step.) **(Educate)**
4. Have students present the images they’ve created. Did any students create the exact same image? Ask students: *How can people who live in the same community see it from completely different perspectives?* Answers could include practical reasons such as living in different parts or being involved with different places, or it could include intangible reasons such as being part of a certain group. **(Educate, Motivate)**
5. Challenge students to repeat the visualization exercise from the beginning of the lesson, but this time, they will visualize their community through the eyes of someone with an intellectual disability. (If students are not familiar with what an intellectual disability is, a definition is included in Activity 3.) *Is this exercise challenging or easy? Do you know whether there are community residents with intellectual disabilities? What do you know about the programs, resources, assets, perceptions, and opportunities in the community for people with intellectual disabilities? Would knowing this information help to give you a clearer picture?* **(Educate, Motivate)**



Are people with intellectual disabilities encouraged/allowed to sign up for sports teams, clubs, and special programs?

Activity 2: What Does My Community Look Like?

Activity Steps and Suggestions:

1. Tell students that this activity will help them get a clearer picture of what their community looks like to those with intellectual disabilities. Have students create a list of questions that will help them form a clearer picture. Possible questions include:
 - *Do people in our community think it's okay to use the R-word?*
 - *Do people in our community know what an intellectual disability is?*
 - *Do people in our community know anyone with an intellectual disability?*
 - *How many people in our community have an intellectual disability?*
 - *What evidence is there that people in the community are tolerant and inclusive of those with intellectual disabilities?*
 - *Are there specific programs for those with intellectual disabilities?*
 - *Are people with intellectual disabilities encouraged/allowed to sign up for sports teams, clubs, and special programs? If so, do they participate?*
 - *Do people with intellectual disabilities have access to jobs within the community?*
 - *What are the perceptions of community members regarding those with intellectual disabilities?*
 - *Are there opportunities for people with and without intellectual disabilities to interact and get to know one another? What programs bring people together?*
 - *Are there opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to share their talents and strengths with other students?*
 - *Do people with intellectual disabilities feel welcomed and included in the community? What programs exist to help them feel welcomed and included?* **(Educate)**
2. Separate students into groups of three or four. Distribute Reproducible 2.1, *A Picture of Your Community*, which challenges students to develop a research plan to learn more about inclusiveness for those with intellectual disabilities in their community. It also challenges them to use this information to conduct an assessment of how their community is doing with regard to tolerance and inclusiveness. You will see that there is a step in the plan where students must get your signature. You may want to consider the following before signing off:
 - a. Will the questions they've chosen help them learn more about inclusiveness and tolerance related to intellectual disabilities in your community?
 - b. Can the questions be answered?
 - c. Is their plan reasonable and well-thought-out?
 - d. Can it be completed within the timeframe you've set? **(Educate, Motivate)**



"If people would believe in us like Special Olympics and see what we can do, they would be amazed. My ambition in life is to turn 'no' into 'yes.' If someone says I can't do something, I want to prove I can."

Suzanne O'Moore,
Special Olympics
Australian Athlete

Activity 2: What Does My Community Look Like?

Activity Steps and Suggestions:

Part Three

Give students ample time and assistance with resources to help them answer their questions. This may require time outside of class. You may also want to ask community members and/or those with intellectual disabilities to come to class to be interviewed. **(Educate, Motivate)**

Part Four

1. Challenge students to use the answers they've uncovered to create a picture of their community, related to inclusiveness of those with intellectual disabilities. They can create this picture through words (e.g., a newsletter, paragraph, speech, etc.) or images (e.g., a drawing, photo essay, video, etc.). This may also require time outside of class to complete. **(Motivate, Activate)**
2. Have students present and explain their pictures to the rest of the class and/or to another class within the school. **(Activate)**



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Encourage students to think creatively about how inclusiveness contributes to the economic health of the entire community and write their reflections in their journals.

Reflection:

When exploring issues in their community, students are often unaware of the economic implications. Ask students to reflect on the community maps presented by their classmates and create a list of ways the current state of inclusiveness of those with intellectual disabilities affects the economic health of their community. For example, is there a workforce that is being underutilized? Services that could be performed more inclusively? Duplication of services between agencies or other community entities? Encourage students to think creatively about how inclusiveness contributes to the economic health of the entire community and write their reflections in their journals.

Suggested Assessment:

Based on what they've learned, have students rate/assess their community with regard to inclusiveness of those with intellectual disabilities. They can base their assessment on a grade similar to a report card, a numeric system, or a descriptive rating ranging from "excellent" to "poor." Their rating should include an explanation with evidence from their research.

Cross-Curricular Extensions:

Mathematics

- Have students design, graph, and analyze a survey as part of their research.

Civics

- Challenge students to interview government officials and community leaders as part of their research process.

Visual Art

- Have students use the visual images they've created to design a mural that represents their vision for a more inclusive community.



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PHOTO BY: Richard Corman



Invite local Special Olympics athletes to the school to learn what would make them feel more included at their school or place of work.

Inclusive Classroom Modifications:

- The first activity may be a bit abstract for those with intellectual disabilities. In inclusive classrooms, you could ask students to write descriptive words or draw a picture of the place that they think of when they think of community. You may wish to provide some suggestions.
- It may be helpful to have guests/resources come to the classroom first to help define community. They can also help define issues in the community, especially those who are involved in serving individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Students can use the concept of Global Messengers to report the results of their research to stakeholders.
- For the assessment, you may wish to provide a grading system along with specific descriptions for each grade.

General Extensions and Modifications:

- Have students report the results of their research to community stakeholders such as government officials, community leaders, business owners, and parents.
- Invite local Special Olympics athletes to the school to learn what would make them feel more included at their school or place of work. Find your Special Olympics Program here:
http://www.specialolympics.org/program_locator.aspx
- Encourage students to start an inclusiveness/tolerance club to discuss issues and ideas to make the community more inclusive to all.

Additional Resources:

- Additional information about intellectual disabilities can be found at:
<http://www.aamr.org> and <http://www.intellectualdisability.info>
- Explore Special Olympics studies conducted on youth attitudes and other topics of interest here:
http://www.specialolympics.org/research_studies.aspx
- Youth Attitudes towards People with Intellectual Disabilities
- Changing Lives Through Sport
- Media Portrayals of People with Intellectual Disability
- Impact of the Special Olympics World Games on the Attitudes of Youth in China

A Picture of Your Community

During this lesson, you created a "picture of your community," based on your own perspective. That image was probably different from those created by other students in your class. Now your challenge is to create a second picture from the perspective of someone with an intellectual disability. How might the image look the same? How might it look different? What information can help you best create that picture? Below is a list of steps that will help you complete this assignment.

1. Identify 1-3 questions that could help you see the community through the eyes of someone with an intellectual disability. Choose questions from the list you developed with your teacher or create your own. Think about questions that will broaden your perspective. For example, simply identifying the number of community residents with an intellectual disability will not necessarily give you insight into how those residents see the community. However, it can help lead you to other questions. Write your questions on the lines below:
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
 - c. _____
2. Create a plan to help you answer those questions. The plan may include interviews, surveys, observation, a series of photographs, or video. Include a timeline to help you implement your plan. Write your plan and timeline below (or on a separate sheet of paper), and then get approval from your teacher.
Teacher Signature: _____
3. Implement your plan.
4. Based on what you've learned, create a picture of your community through the eyes of someone with an intellectual disability. You can create your picture through words, photos, video, a drawing, or another product. Be sure to include information about inclusiveness and tolerance.
5. Your final step is to use this information to rate or assess your community with regard to inclusiveness and tolerance for those with intellectual disabilities. Choose a grading system similar to a report card; a rating system ranging from "excellent" to "poor;" or a numeric system with "10" being the best possible score. Include a justification for your answer.